From: Brian Adam Pike
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/8/01 2:07am
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

To whom it may concern:

I have some concerns about the proposed antitrust settlement with Microsoft, which I'd like to voice.

First, as I understand it, Microsoft will give its software to schools along with donations of computers. One thing that is important to remember about the software industry is that after the first copy of the software has been sold, it essentially costs $0 to make the second copy. As a result, it will cost Microsoft extremely little to give its software to schools (except for the cost of media and possibly technical support).

Another important thing to remember is that since Microsoft does not publish their APIs or the file formats for the Office suite, it will be very difficult for the schools to move away from Microsoft products; the documents they may have created using the donated equipment will not be readable with other software products. As a result, the schools will be 'locked in' to Microsoft software, and will be forced to upgrade in the next product cycle. For example, Windows 95 has just become officially unsupported by Microsoft, so Microsoft is not making its software products compatible with Windows 95. Any licenses for Windows 95 that schools may have are now worthless.

If the APIs and file formats were published, then various other companies or open-source projects could guarantee full compatibility with documents created with the Microsoft Office Suite. This would provide an avenue for consumers to move away from Microsoft products, hurting Microsoft's monopoly. Currently, such competing projects attempt to reverse-engineer the APIs and file formats, with very limited success. For example, NTFS (the Windows-NT File System) support on Linux is extremely flaky, and has been threatened with legal action from Microsoft. If the documentation for NTFS was available, Linux would very quickly have full, seamless support for NTFS filesystems. With this support in place, it will provide an avenue for consumers to move away from the Windows NT product line to other operating systems (such as Linux) without destroying all of their important data.

It is important that these data be published without any restrictions. The current settlement gives Microsoft the ability to decide who is allowed to view APIs, Documentation, and Communications Protocols. What would stop Microsoft from preventing some groups from accessing this information?

I believe the settlement should include one or more of the following requirements:

- Put their API and file format documentation in the public domain, without any non-disclosure agreements or other restrictions on usage.
- Fund the development of competing products, such as various open

source products (OpenOffice, AbiWord, Gnumeric, the KOffice suite, SaMBa).

     - Provide a donation of hardware and competing software to
schools. If children only know how to use Microsoft products, it ensures
the future success of Microsoft's monopoly. However, if we teach them how
to use other products, it will hurt Microsoft's monopoly. Red Hat
Software has publicly supported this option, and offered to provide the
software and support for free.

     - Force Microsoft to stop using its software dominance to
encourage use of its other products (i.e., using the Windows XP
installation to advertise Microsoft's MSN network, Microsoft's Passport
authentication service, etc.). This is like selling milk with flour
built-in, as an integral part of the milk product, in order to bake bread.
It simply makes no sense, especially if there is only one brand of milk on
the shelves.

     Thank you for your time and attention on this topic.

Sincerely,
     Brian Pike
     Student, NC State University